



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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PRESIDENT

Dr. Philip Pomper
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Dear Philip:

Thank you for sending me your review of Shmookler's book. I have had it on my shelf, have read several other reviews of it, have wondered whether it would be worth the time to look at it more closely. Your review prompted me to scan it just a bit and I'm confirmed in my conclusion that it really does not have very much to offer.

You were so right in your criticism of his romanticism! If it had deeper scholarship, that would still be interesting. Look at the shallowness with which he refers to Rousseau or Carlyle (just check the index entries); and I would have far more critical things to say about his biological attributions. I would guess, not needing much reading between the lines of your own review, that we are not very far apart in the assessment. But I would have to confess that I've really not carefully read the book and I am seeing it through projections of various reviewers. If it be understood that that is what I am talking about, where in the world is that "benign state of nature" that he postulates behind his parable?

The reason why his book does have some appeal is of course that the dilemma behind the parable is all too real! In my own encounters I have found that it takes a person of rare statesmanship to be able to mobilize himself, much less others, to what is necessary in common defense without making the most atrocious attributions about the adversary. Where this is most harmful is where it blinds one to the understanding that security is a shared dilemma. One of the most refreshing aspects of the new Soviet regime is that Gorbachev for the first time has been articulating that point very clearly on their side!

To go back to Shmookler (projected): it would be a grievous error to suppose that the problem of power begins with conflict between tribes. It is no less of an issue within organizations at every level of social complexity.

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I'm not sure how broadly I would want to voice this, but my own study of human evolution suggests that Arthur Clarke, in 2001, had the most arresting metaphor: do you recall the ape man tossing the jawbone into the air, where it is transformed into the interplanetary rocket? It is hard for me to see what could have spurred human evolution and the development of intelligence so rapidly, other than the exigencies of intraspecies conflict. So we have indeed a ghost in the machine; and we would have to go far back to some pre-human level of biological organization (perhaps the ants and the bees) to find instincts for social order weigh heavily against individual cunning and search for advantage.

I am no more an optimist than Shmookler whether the pace of evolution of social forms can match the power to destroy but we must start with a clear sighted understanding of the problem.

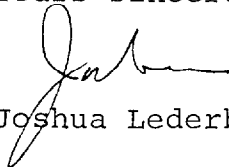
This is really not my own primary interest in "psycho-politics"; although I have had running discussion for many years with my very good friend David Hamburg on these matters. He is far better informed and far shrewder than Shmookler (although I think he may be one of his fans). Anyhow here is something he wrote a while ago that I think you would be interested in.

My own taste for political psychology is more in the direction of understanding leadership behavior during crisis, about which I gave you some references to Lebow, Janis, and Jervis. I have been spending some considerable part of my time for many years on international security affairs; and as skeptical as I seem to be about these biopsychological approaches, I can assure you that in the circles where I travel I am their most ardent exponent!

You said you had written something on the biography of a terrorist: if you still have that in mind I would enjoy seeing it, by all means.

With all best wishes,

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg

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